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The turncoat's object lesson

There's an object lesson in the case of Lowell D. Skinner, the Korean War turncoat who recently returned to this country after nine years in Red China.

Allen Dulles, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, cited the Skinner example to emphasize the need for teaching young people the meaning of communism before they enter the service. He expressed the belief that Skinner and the 20 other captured American soldiers who defected to the Communists were unprepared in school to "meet the kind of indoctrination they received" as prisoners of war.

Skinner disputed Mr. Dulles' thesis. The 32-year-old Ohioan, who was 19 years of age when captured, denied he was subjected to indoctrination. Rather, he explained that he was moved by curiosity to go to China, after he discovered that his Red Chinese captives "were born on this planet and are human," that they were not "fanatics," even though Communists.

This explanation underlines the validity of Mr. Dulles' stress on the need for backgrounding American young people in communism so that they will be able to handle the various Cold War challenges they will meet as adults.

But Skinner's defense also underlines the importance of unemotional, factual instruction, in contrast to the highly-colored indoctrination in which classes in communism too often deal and which is part today of our cultural environment.

The comments of a nine-year defector have to be taken with large grains of salt, but it would appear that Skinner was, in part at least, a victim of the "devil thesis" approach to communism.

He apparently was surprised and disarmed when he discovered his Communist captors were "human," in that they did not match in his eyes the prototype of sadistic little dictators that Communist soldiers and officials are popularly portrayed to be in comic books and Grade C



Mrs. Skinner and her son

movies. Thus, it is conceivable that he started down the slippery slope of cooperation with his captors from which he dared not turn back—for nine years—when he confused personality for ideology.

Of course, the most thorough courses in communism and its pitfalls will not endow weak men with courage, surfeit the greedy or balance the emotionally unstable. And these elements undoubtedly were factors in the personalities of many of those Americans who defected or collapsed during Communist captivity.

Yet Skinner's self-justification rings true enough as at least a partial explanation of his failure to warn against overstaging the Communist menace, as well as underestimating its dangers and its appetite.

As people, Communists are as good, bad and indifferent as the rest of the human family. It is the Communist ideology to which they subscribe and that dictates both their personal conduct and state policies that is both dangerous and wasteful and against which knowledge is the best immunization.

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